

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. J. William White

1850—1916



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

"Beyond the path of the outmost sun, through utter darkness hurled,
Further than ever comet flared or vagrant star-dust swirled;
Live such as fought and sailed, and ruled and loved and made our World."

THE spirit of our fellow-member, Dr. J. William White, passed on to that realm of eternity in the evening of April 24th last. Born November 2, 1850, his life has spanned nearly sixty-six years.

It is the desire of the Trustees to express their sense of personal sorrow, and official loss—in some respects almost irreparable, and in brief outline to record something of his personality, and of his useful, and forceful career; especially of that part of it which for nearly a half century brought him into such close association with the University; a relationship which, by reason of the perpetual endowments in his will, happily will continue through her endless years.

It would not be within the scope of this Memorial to refer at length to Dr. White's ancestry. Suffice to say that his paternal line is traced from Henry White, his first American ancestor who emigrated from England and settled in Virginia in 1649; and a later maternal line, from Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. One of early Greece's philosophers has said "it is indeed a desirable thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to our ancestors." Dr. White recognized this, and believed that a man's own superior attainments should be his real title to nobility among his fellows. Proud in a proper sense and to a proper degree therefore of his descent, Dr. White nevertheless strove as a true American to give additional lustre to the ancestral name. And he succeeded; succeeded as a student in our University and later as a professor and trustee; and beyond her walls, as a surgeon, author, traveler, sportsman and patron of athletics; and as a citizen, publicist, and a protagonist of preparedness and militant Americanism; and crowning all, as one of Nature's masterpieces—a friend.

And first then, with reference to his association with the University. Entering in 1869, he was graduated from the Medical School in 1871 and the same year received the degree of Ph.D., standing at the head of his class. Shortly after graduation, he was appointed Lecturer on Surgery, and a few years later Demonstrator of Surgery; still later he was made Professor of Genito-Urinary Surgery, and from 1887 to 1900 Professor of Clinical Surgery; when he was promoted to the John Rhea Barton Professorship of Surgery. This chair he held until 1910, when, upon retirement from his active teaching duties, he was appointed Professor Emeritus of Surgery, continuing to hold this appointment until his death. While these honors were being conferred in the Medical School, he was receiving similar honorary appointments in the University Hospital, of which he was a surgeon, and on the Board of Managers, of which he served with zeal and fidelity for nearly twenty years. The final act of his busy life was the organization of the University of Pennsylvania's unit of the American Ambulance Hospital in Paris, whither he sailed in June, 1915, with a corps of surgeons, mostly graduates of our Medical School. They had charge of 180 beds devoted to the care and treatment of the soldiers wounded in the present great foreign war. Digressing for a moment, we may say that en route, Dr. White met the late and lamented Lord Kitchener in London, and was given a luncheon by Mr. and Mrs. Asquith, and was also entertained by those high in diplomatic circles in

Paris. These complimentary attentions he was happy to believe were due largely to the publication a short time previously of his book, "A Text Book for Americans," which was widely read abroad. Returning home in August, 1915, he again took up his share—a large one, as we all know—of the duties and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, on which he served so intelligently and indefatigably since his election in 1911. Giving no evidence of abated vigor, he attended, as before, the meetings of the Finance Committee; was active in the work of the Phipps Institute and upon the Board of Managers of the Hospital. Of all the departments of the University, he probably was most deeply interested in the Medical School and the Hospital. This is evidenced by his generous bequest (\$150,000) for the endowment of a Professorship of "Surgical Research" in the Medical School for the purpose of "making additions to surgical knowledge which will lessen the sum of human suffering"; and a like gift of one-third of the residue of his estate for the maintenance of beds in a Special Ward in the Hospital for the "care of patients immediately after grave surgical operations"; as well as by his further bequests to establish a prize for "the nurse who shall stand at the head of the graduating class each year"; and to provide presents for the resident physicians and children and patients in the Hospital at Christmas and Easter.

To the Department of Physical Education Dr. White also gave much attention. It will be recalled that he inaugurated that department in 1884; that he was its first professor and served without salary until it was established; also that he was the Chairman of the Committee of Alumni who through him presented to the University in December, 1904, our fully equipped gymnasium and athletic grounds, Weightman Hall and Franklin Field, at a cost of nearly \$600,000, and that later he was likewise instrumental in adding the gift to the University of the adjoining Training House and Dormitory.

About the same time he also secured from the Weightman Estate a further donation of \$50,000—for the advancement of Physical Education and athletics, the disposition of the fund being left to him as sole trustee. This trust is duly executed by him in his will. In the light of what has been said, it was natural that in addition to the endowments for the Medical School and Hospital before mentioned, Dr. White should also have given another one-third of his residuary estate to this Board of Trustees as a perpetual endowment "for the promotion of physical education and athletics at the University."

Nobler legacies than these can no man leave—an everlasting honor to him who gives, and a like blessing to those that take.

In reviewing this phase of his career, that is, as a University man, it is proper to mention that in 1906 he was given the degree of LL.D. by the University of Aberdeen on the occasion of its 400th Anniversary and was chosen to make the speech of congratulation in behalf of all the American universities.

It remains to say something of Dr. White in a larger sphere as a man of the world. He was many sided. As probably prompting his interest in the Department of Physical Education, may be noted his great fondness for athletics, especially inter-class and inter-collegiate. He was particularly interested in football, which game he always vigorously defended as being on the whole beneficial to the boys who take part in it, and as offering—in spite of some abuses—a vigorous ideal to American college students. An article published in *The Outlook* on this subject, written in the fall of 1905, in reply to the adverse criticisms of President Eliot of Harvard, led to an invitation

to Dr. White to the White House to discuss the matter with President Roosevelt, who, following the visit, emphatically declared himself in favor of the game. This was the real beginning of his friendship, personal and political, with Colonel Roosevelt, which grew warmer and closer during the succeeding years until Dr. White's death.

He was largely instrumental in re-establishing the annual match between the Naval and Military Academies, and in arranging for many years to have it played on Franklin Field.

Dr. White was himself an enthusiastic and versatile sportsman. As a long distance swimmer, it will be recalled that he covered the distance (about ten miles as it had to be swum) (probably three times the length of Leander's classic swim) from Narragansett to Newport in cold, rough weather in less than six hours in 1880. During his "strenuous life" he was at different times a devotee of sparring, rowing, bicycling, walking and more recently mountain climbing. He was a member of both the Swiss and American Alpine Clubs. It may be noted here that the portrait by Sargeant in 1910, now in the possession of the University—the gift of admiring friends—depicts Dr. White's features with the hue and tan of an Alpine summer upon them. When the portrait was on exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts, some one said jocularly, "That's not Dr. White, it's Dr. Black," to which the rejoinder was made, "I would rather go down to posterity featured with that Alpine tan, than look like that anemic"—referring to his critic. To those who knew Dr. White, such a "retort courteous" was to be expected. On occasion, he did not hesitate to use the "et tu quoque" as a silencing argument. Underneath, however, a sometimes seeming brusqueness and a characteristic aggressiveness was a kindliness of soul. He had an open heart, and an open hand for a friend, and a fist for an enemy; though the latter were few and usually ultimately became his friends. "Paint me as I am," said Cromwell to Sir Peter Lely. "If you leave out a scar or wrinkle, I won't give you a shilling." So, too, assuredly, would Dr. White wish to be painted; exactly as he was, physically and temperamentally.

Turning to another aspect of his career, mention should be made that he was an exemplary public-spirited citizen. His civic pride and desire to make ours a city beautiful, led fittingly to his appointment as a member of the Park Commission; and like motives caused him to organize the Rittenhouse Square Improvement Company, of which he was president, and to bequeath a fund toward its maintenance and adornment. Thoroughly human in every way, Dr. White was always heartily interested in any movement, and more particularly in the recent widespread legislation, for the social uplift and betterment of working men and women; he was an advocate of Women Suffrage and generally, we may add, of the progressive policies of Colonel Roosevelt, including "Preparedness" and "Americanism," and all that these terms stand for in the present crisis in our national history. Intense in his Americanism, believing in Democracy, its spirit and dominion, he was of the insistent opinion that the United States should actually fight with the Allies in the present war.

Following his edition of "A Text Book for Americans," already alluded to, he published "Germany and Democracy," as well as numerous controversial anti-German articles which appeared in the public prints, all written in support of the cause of the Allies and against Hohenzollernism.

Dr. White always wrote with a facile and forceful pen, and his writings are numerous, some of them in literary vein, but most of them on scientific subjects, chiefly in the domain of surgery. This, as we know, was his chosen profession, in which he was eminent. He was not only one of the greatest and most successful practitioners of his generation, but he was also a teacher and writer in surgery

during his whole professional life; was a member of the American Surgical Association; a member and ex-president of the American Genito-Urinary Association; and a fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. He was joint translator and editor of Cornil on Syphilis (Simes and White), 1875; joint author of the American Text Book of Surgery (Keen and White), 1896; Genito-Urinary Surgery (White and Martin), 1897; and Piersol's "Human Anatomy," 1907. He has also written numerous monographs on medical and surgical subjects in medical journals. It would unduly lengthen this memorial to even enumerate these articles.

Dr. White was an extensive traveler. Shortly after his graduation he was appointed to a position on the staff of Professor Agassiz on the Hassler Expedition which sailed from Boston in 1871 around the Horn and reached San Francisco the following year. The trip probably engendered his love of travel which so grew upon him, that for nearly twenty years prior to his death, he spent from three to four months in foreign climes; taking a tour around the world with Mrs. White—always his inseparable companion—in 1913-1914. His return from these recreative absences abroad was often made the occasion of triumphal receptions by the student body and his friends.

And his friends, be it said, were legion; and they were to be found in all walks of life; the mighty and the lowly, the rich and the poor; among learned professors, physicians, scientists, artists, jurists and journalists; leaders in the business and financial world; statesmen and high officials; the savants of the Franklin Inn Club and members of his social clubs at home and abroad; and the ward patients in the hospitals, the convicts in the Penitentiary, and the inmates of the Almshouse. A "Friend," says Emerson, "may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature." "Billy" White was such a friend—of yours and mine, and in a broad sense of humankind. He was "Bill" or "Billy" White to all. And it is just such a man, as some one has said, who has the "Bill" in him who is ever in sympathetic touch with the people, who knows their needs and wants and hopes and aspirations and longs to help them to better things and higher ideals. It has been so in all time—from Cyrus, who, it is recorded, "was on speaking terms and knew by name every soldier in his vast army; and Alexander, who waded the rivers of India, breast high, shoulder to shoulder, with his sturdy bowmen, and fought in the ranks of his Pyrrhic Phalanx"; to our own "Jim" Blaine and "Teddy" Roosevelt. And so with "Billy" White. He was a man who could "walk with kings—nor lose the common touch."

"My religion is to do good," said a great patriot of the Revolution. That this was also essentially true of our deceased member, is manifest by the creation of an endowment fund in his will for the benefit of discharged convicts of the Eastern Penitentiary, from whom he directs shall be selected each year that one "who is most likely to be helped to permanently honest ways by the gift of the income of this fund;" and the similar provision in aid of "that patient, male or female, who has been discharged during the year from the surgical wards, or the venereal wards, of the Philadelphia Hospital—who will be most likely to be helped thereby to procure steady employment, and to earn a decent livelihood."

In these and the other provisions of his will is probably revealed the faith of Dr. White; humanity may be said to have been his creed; to do good, his religion. And here it may be observed as included among the friends mentioned in his testament, are the Rev. B. M. Neill, Secretary of the Society for the Aid of Seamen, and Dr. Joseph C. McCracken, of rigid Scotch Presbyterianity, as Dr. White well knew, the head of the University Christian Association's Medical School in China.

That Dr. White was a member of no church and professed no Orthodox religious belief, has excited some adverse comment. One recalls the criticism of Stephen Girard:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged," is a text which we, professing Christianity, should do well to remember. "There lives more faith in honest doubt," said Tennyson, "believe me, than in half the creeds."

Dr. White continued to labor zealously for his friends and fellows and to evince a deep interest in the causes dear to his heart to the very last. Only a few weeks before he died, learning that a University brother was making application for an important hospital appointment, Dr. White addressed numerous letters to persons of influence, saying, "I have just heard this and although I am on a sick bed, I am mustering up my strength to lay before you what I confidently regard his justification for making such application," and then proceeded to state his friend's qualifications at length. In the last two interviews one of us had with him, while morphine was being administered to allay his excruciating pain, he counseled how we could aid the friend mentioned; conferred about University plans and activities, and discussed the then coming Presidential nomination with patriotic fervor as affecting the future of this country and the world. Within a week the end came. There was no funeral; this was in accord with his desire. Only the City Troop, of which he was one-time surgeon, stood guard, as his body, whence his spirit had flown, was borne away for cremation. His brain, in the interest of science, he gave to the Wistar Institute.

Thus throughout, he fought his good fight in the battle of life; and won. And this University, which he loved so much, and the wider world in which we dwell, are better now, and will be through the years to come, because he lived and labored here. And as Lowell said of their mutual friend, Agassiz:

"His magic was not far to seek,
He was so human."

JOHN C. BELL, '84

Philadelphia
June 12, 1916

